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July 23, 2009

Mr. Speaker, good evening. Since the Wright brothers left the ground for the first time at Kitty Hawk, aviation has fascinated our collective imagination, contributed to unprecedented interaction among people, and grown to become one of the most important industries in our Nation.

Whether it was aviators of the past, like Charles Lindbergh, Amelia Earhart, or those more recently, like Steve Fossett, who flew a solo, nonstop trip around the world that began and ended in Salina, Kansas, aviation has had a unique ability to capture our attention and to inspire us to achieve things which we once thought were impossible.

Advances in aviation technology and engineering have led to the development of larger, faster, more fuel-efficient planes that carry passengers and goods around the world. The ease of travel and shipment modern aviation allows has contributed to a worldwide economic growth and to new opportunities for leisure travel for far more people than ever before. In America, the aviation industry accounts for more than \$1 trillion in economic activity each year. Millions of Americans are employed by this critical industry that facilitates so many other economic transactions.

As a Kansan, I take special pride in the aviation industry, which has deep roots in our State. Pioneers in the industry, such as Glenn Stearman, Walter Beech, Clyde Cessna, Bill Lear, and Amelia Earhart, all have important connections to the Sunflower State. Many of these innovators helped establish Wichita as the "Air Capital of the World." Today, a who's who of aviation companies operates in the city of Wichita, including Boeing, Airbus, Bombardier, Cessna, Hawker Beechcraft, Spirit Aerosystems, and Raytheon.

In Kansas, the aviation industry accounts for 20 percent of the state's manufacturing employment, and it employs tens of thousands of Kansans. Engineers, machinists, mechanics, inspectors, scientists, and technicians are dedicated to producing the best aircraft in the world. These employees take great pride in what they do, and they deserve our support.

Yet the industry faces significant challenges. The recession has hit aviation hard, and many workers have lost their jobs. During the difficult times that we're in, Congress especially needs to be supportive of this critical component of America's manufacturing base. Efforts to demagogue about the use of private planes and business aviation by private corporations harm this industry. I was troubled in January, during the consideration of the TARP Reform and Accountability Act, that provisions to limit businesses from leasing or from using general aircraft for business purposes were almost included in the final legislation. Doing so would have lowered the national aviation production, and it would have hurt workers everywhere, especially in Kansas, where more than 54 percent of our country's aviation products are manufactured.

Congress must remember the importance of this industry, not only to our national economy but to so many local and regional economies within the country. It is in our collective interest to protect and to encourage growth in the general aviation community.

As a member of the Congressional Aviation Caucus, I work to inform and to educate Members of Congress about the importance of this industry to our nation. Congress was right to, once again, reject the "user-fee" proposal that would have further harmed general aviation. User fees would have unfairly burdened the general aviation industry. Congress must continue to oppose unnecessary taxes or fees on general aviation. Those in Congress must also question and fight the impractical regulations, such as the Transportation Security Administration's large aircraft security proposal, which would apply to many of the planes owned by individuals and small companies.

When it comes to key American industries, aviation is at the top of the list. I encourage my colleagues to join me in pledging to do all we can to promote aviation through responsible policy.

